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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KIRF](#) [PK](#) [CH](#) [SA](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: NINGXIA MUSLIMS, PART 2: BUDDING FUNDAMENTALISM
AND THE SPREAD OF THE "NEW TEACHINGS"

REF: A. BEIJING 1691
[1](#)B. BEIJING 1643
[1](#)C. 2006 BEIJING 9665
[1](#)D. 2006 BEIJING 8788
[1](#)E. 2007 BEIJING 7330

Classified By: Deputy Political Section Chief Ben Moeling. Reasons 1.4
(b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The Salafiyya movement, a Saudi Wahhabist import which promotes a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, has established a small but significant presence in Ningxia in recent years, according to scholars and imams in northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Surprisingly, the Government has accepted the group's rise, even as Ikhwan and Sufi imams told PolOff they oppose Salafiyyas over of theological differences. Small, "extreme" sects have surfaced in reaction to changes in society and popular culture as part of globalization, but most of these "cult-ish" sects "quickly disappear," says one Muslim scholar in Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia. Ikhwan, similarly known for its pursuit of a "purer," less Sino-fied form of Islam and closer adherence to the practices of Middle Eastern Muslims, also appears to be extending its reach in Ningxia. Although Ikhwan contacts in Ningxia and Shaanxi oppose the Salafiyyas, the spread of Ikhwan is not known to be a source of serious conflict among Hui Muslim communities. End Summary.

Globalization is a Challenge as are Government Controls

[1](#)2. (C) PolOff visited northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Shaanxi Province March 30-April 4. Ningxia scholars, imams and officials described a wide range of government controls on Islam which contribute to a generally discouraging environment for religious development of Islam in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (ref A). Ningxia University Sharia law expert Professor Zhou Chuanbin (strictly protect), an ethnic Hui who is bluntly critical of government restrictions on religion, conceded that the forces of modernization and globalization pose a greater challenge to the influence and growth of Islam in China than do local controls. Both Zhou and a Yinchuan City-based imam surnamed Luo blamed the lack of religion and religious values in popular mass media for what he pessimistically sees as a decline in the strength of Islam across Ningxia.

Budding Fundamentalist Movement Opposed by Other Muslims

[1](#)3. (C) Professor Zhou conceded that the emergence of small

"extreme" sects and the early spread of the Wahhabist Salafiyya sect (also known as the "new new teachings") represent a minor but notable backlash against modernization in Muslim communities. While "extreme" sects have occasionally emerged in recent years in Ningxia, Zhou said they quickly "disappear" soon after coming to people's attention. Zhou did not elaborate on how these sects are dispersed. Salafiyyas, on the other hand, have enjoyed a limited but steady rise in recent years. Though Zhou told PolOff that the Salafiyya movement arrived in China over fifty years ago, he estimates that all of the forty to fifty Salafiyya mosques in Ningxia sprang up in the past decade.

¶4. (C) Imam Ma Ziming, an Ikhwan of Guyuan's Dongfang Mosque, told PolOff he and other Ikhwan "adamantly oppose" Salafiyya teachings and practices, dismissing their "incorrect" religious practices. Ma clarified that such intra-religion disagreement was only "theological" and did not spill over into conflict outside the mosque. (NOTE: According to Imam Luo from Yinchuan, the Government opposes the proliferation of sects outside the five "main" divisions among Ningxia Muslims---Qadim, Ikhwan, and the Chinese Sufi schools or "menhuan" of Khufiyya, Jahriyya and Qadiriyya---in the interests of avoiding intra-ethnic conflict. "Menhuan" is a term used for Chinese Sufi sects.) Hong Yang, a Sufi imam and community leader in central Ningxia's Tongxin County, disapproves of the Salafiyyas' rejection of religious hierarchy and their belief that they can directly interpret the words of Allah and the Prophet. Despite the Government's reported opposition to the proliferation of sects, contacts in Ningxia and Beijing say that the Government is accepting and tolerating the Salafiyyas' presence in northwest China

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(ref B).

¶5. (C) While PolOff did not get an opportunity to meet with Salafiyya imams or followers in Ningxia, a Salafiyya man surnamed Ma in the nearby metropolis of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, told PolOff that Salafiyyas follow the original principles and practices of Mohammad and they more strictly obey the "laws" of Islam. Unlike other mosques in Xi'an, every man in the Salafiyya Xicang Mosque wore a beard, and two men, who may have been foreign or Chinese, even dressed in long Saudi robes and headdresses. Similar to a Salafiyya mosque PolOffs visited in Qinghai Province in 2006, the Xicang Mosque is plain and stark in comparison with Qadim, Ikhwan and Sufi mosques (ref C) in the surrounding areas. Ma boasted that the Salafiyya practices adhere more closely to those of Muslims in Saudi Arabia and "the Middle East." Ma looks down upon other Chinese Muslims for "picking and choosing" which religious rules to follow, and believes that they, too, should grow out beards in accordance with Islamic custom. Such views corroborate the assessment of an academic contact in Beijing that Salafiyyas can be highly critical of those they perceive as less righteous (ref D). Unlike the warm reception received at other mosques in Ningxia and Xi'an, Ma would only speak with PolOff in the mosque's entrance way because "non-Muslims are forbidden to come inside." After promising a chat with the mosque's imam if PolOff returned half an hour later, PolOff came back to find the mosque doors padlocked shut.

Continued Spread of Ikhwan Across Northwest

¶6. (C) Ningxia contacts confirmed previous reports that the influence of Ikhwan, a Sunni sect most prominent in Qinghai and southern Gansu Provinces which seeks to restore Chinese Islam to a purer, less Sino-fied form, is gradually growing in popularity among Hui across northwest China, including Ningxia (ref E). Contacts say that Ikhwan imams are known for using more standard Arabic in religious services than the Qadim and for seeking to further emulate Middle Eastern Muslim practices. Both Luo in Yinchuan and Ma Ziming in Guyuan follow Ikhwan. The spread of Ikhwan is not known to

be a source of any conflict among Hui Muslim communities in Ningxia. While the Salafiyya movement is a direct import from Saudi Arabia, Ikhwan seems to represent a reform of Qadim, the "old teachings," as a result of increasing Middle Eastern influence. Though Ikhwan contacts in Ningxia and Shaanxi oppose the Salafiyyas, it is unclear if the two groups view each other as direct competitors.

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